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ABSTRACT

A number of misconceptions exist concerning broadcast education. Professional broadcasters often complain that broadcast students receive too little "hands-on" training, while academicians decry current broadcasting programs which do not challenge the students intellectually. In addition, broadcast students have their own set of expectations based on the view that college education is primarily a training ground for gainful employment. Most broadcast educators realize that, in the midst of the information age, students of mass communication must not only acquire a broad liberal arts education but must also be exposed to the cultures, politics, and problems facing other nations. Only those media students who clearly understand and appreciate the enormous power and influence of the mass media can succeed in becoming responsible producers, directors, reporters, writers, announcers or performers. A recent national survey of broadcast education programs indicated that most are carefully designed to offer students a balanced practical and theoretical experience. The "trade-school image" of broadcast education is simply an unfortunate misconception. (RS)

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BROADCAST EDUCATION: FIGHTING THE TRADE SCHOOL IMAGE

by

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We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge.

John Naisbitt
Megatrends
Warner Books, 1984.

BROADCAST EDUCATION: FIGHTING THE SCHOOL TRADE IMAGE

In the past few years, the educational institutions in the United States have experienced an increased level of scrutiny and criticism by almost every segment of the society. Consequently, the phrase "crisis in American education" has become a trade-mark for a system which was perceived, particularly outside this country, to be one of the best educational systems in the world.

Some of the general complaints being generated within the media, the academia, and the society include the followings:

--The educational system is not working the way it should.
--The educational system is producing an increasingly inferior product.
--The educational system in the United States is lagging behind the U.S.S.R., Japan, and Germany.
--SAT scores have been falling during the past decade or so.
--Today's high school and college graduates possess less skills than the earlier graduates.
--Today, more students drop out of high schools and colleges than ever before.

The list can go on and on! In fact, in its 1983 report entitled "A Nation at Risk," the National Commission on

Excellence in Education spoke of the "rising tide of mediocrity" in the educational system in the United Sates.

The above charges, have resulted in a proliferation of surveys, studies, articles, books, and seminars for the purpose of either supporting, rejecting or finding ways to modify some of the perceived allegations pertaining to the American educational system in general and certain disciplines in particular.

Of course, any detailed discussion of the charges made against the educational system in this country is beyond the scope of this paper. Hence, this paper will attempt to address some of the complaints regarding the performance of broadcast education programs at the college/university level.

In its December 1987 report entitled "Electronic Media Career Preparation Study," the Roper Organization spoke of a general dissatisfaction, by the executives in electronic media, regarding broadcast education programs in the United States. The report concluded:

--that entry level job applicants (broadcast graduates) are prone to unrealistic career expectations;

--that broadcast graduates do not possess adequate hands-on experience in the broadcasting or cable industries;

--that while colleges and universities provide a good broad overview of the industry, they fail in providing practical knowledge for the real world; and

--that the most important thing that higher education can do

to improve the quality of the career preparation which students receive is expose students to people who have recent experience or are currently employed in the electronic media.(1)

Contrary to the professional broadcasters opinion that broadcast students receive too little "hands-on" training, Paul F. Fullifor writes that, in fact, "many of the broadcasting programs at universities around the country today are perceived as little more than hands-on, push-button programs which rarely challenge students intellectually."(2)

The reality is that no matter where we stand and how we look at the broadcast education, we run across a number of misconceptions. Unfortunately, misconceptions regarding broadcast education exist within the electronic media industry as well as within the academia. What is problematic is the fact that, on one hand, the broadcast educators are expected to meet the electronic media executives demand for putting **more emphasis** on "hands-on" experience and, on the other hand, they are expected by their fellow academicians to put **less emphasis** on "hands-on" experience or vocational training!

Smacked right in the middle are the broadcast students who often hold their own individual perceptions of the so-called "real world," and, hence, their own sets of expectations. Of course, we cannot ignore the parents of the students who also hold their own perceptions and

expectations. It seems that the parents, like their children, view college education as primarily a training ground for gainful employment.

Today broadcast educators are under enormous amount of pressure to meet some seemingly contradictory demands posed by the electronic media industry, the academic institutions, the students, and their parents. As mentioned earlier, the broadcast executives expect more hands-on experience and less theoretical learning while the academicians, especially the non-broadcast educators, expect less hands-on training and more theoretical learning! While the broadcast students are not quite sure which is more important, theory or practice, the parents anxiously contemplate their income and job possibilities immediately after graduation!

Most broadcast educators, nevertheless, seem to go beyond the superficial and continuously changing "real world" by looking at the broader function of broadcast education. According to Jeffrey M. McCall,

> A purely skill-driven approach to media education diminishes the utility of the student both for the non-media, and eventually media-related careers. Media practitioners need the broad educational background that comes with understanding in expression, sociology, literature, business, etc.(3)

It goes without saying that in the midst of the information age, all students, particularly the students of

mass communication, must not only acquire a broad liberal arts education but must also be exposed to the cultures, politics, and problems facing other nations. How can those broadcast students whose aspirations are producing, directing, reporting or performing effectively carry out their every-day responsibilities without being able to understand and appreciate the interconnectedness of today's global affairs.

As has been illustrated by the demise of the smokestack industries in the United States, skill-oriented training and education cannot necessarily ensure a permanent job. For the simple reason that technological tools, used to perform any particular function, can and do change rapidly--especially in the electronic media field. Hence, skills can become outdated quickly. What remains constant is the theoretical knowledge. An understanding of the processes--knowing how and why certain things should be done in a particular fashion or order. According to Jannette L. Dates,

> It is essential to the broadcast (mass communication) curriculum to de-emphasize the performance of media aspects of course-work and focus on theory, so communication theory determines the curriculum. This approach will lessen dependence upon media industry shifts and changes. Higher education, therefore, will no

longer need to compulsively change programs and sequences to follow industry trends.(4)

Furthermore, not only the mass communication or broadcasting faculty, but also other faculty within the academic institutions must realize the fact that television, in particular, is now the dominant force in our society--both at the national and global levels. Television now is the primary purveyor of culture, news and information. All students, especially the broadcast students, should clearly understand the collective power of mass communications. This kind of understanding, of course, requires a great deal of research, analysis, examinations, discussions, and debates.

The glamour and excitement of broadcasting, especially television, has attracted a growing number of students to this field during the past two decades or so. Undoubtedly, some of today's highly motivated media students may become tomorrow's professional communicators. But, only those media students who clearly understand and appreciate the enormous power and influence of the mass media can succeed at becoming responsible producers, directors, reporters, writers, announcers or performers. Otherwise, anyone can learn to turn knobs or push buttons!

At a recent industry/faculty seminar, sponsored by the International Radio and Television Society in New York City, a broadcast faculty asked a panel of broadcast executives, "what do you really expect our broadcast students to know

upon their graduation?" Their collective answers were, "we want people who (1) can write and speak clearly, (2) have a good understanding of the communication media, (3) can solve problems, (4) can interact with a diverse group of people, (5) have good organizational and technical skills, and (6) have the right attitude."

The Roper's report on "Electronic Media Career Preparation Study" not withstanding, it appears that at least some of the electronic executives' expectations closely match what the broadcast educators are attempting to accomplish in their broadcast programs. It should be noted that more emphasis on "hands-on" skills and less on "theoretical" skills may lead into the kind of trade-school mentality that both the academicians and broadcast executives resent. Furthermore, in view of today's highly competitive broadcast environment, such emphasis would clearly limit the students prospects for finding an alternative position in other fields (e.g., sales, marketing, management, advertising, public relations).

Clearly a strong "liberal arts" background combined with sufficient technical and theoretical skills can be advantageous to both the broadcast graduates and the broadcast executives. In the midst of the information age, global competition, and rapidly changing technological means it is indeed futile to speak of narrow specializations within any field of study--especially electronic media.

Nevertheless, a recent national survey of broadcast education programs in the United States, by Yahya R. Kamalipour and William Robinson, revealed that the majority of broadcast education programs tend to follow a similar educational philosophy. Of the 126 to 130 credits required for graduation, broadcast students are generally required to take fewer than 20 credits in courses which fall under the umbrella of "hands-on" experience. These course are: radio production, basic television production, advanced television production, and ENG/EFP production. In addition, most broadcast programs offer an "internship" course in which students can gain experience in a variety of industry settings (i.e, radio, cable or television stations).

For instance, the Radio-Television degree program within the Communication and Creative Arts at Purdue University (see attached), is perhaps a good representative of the broadcast education programs nationwide. As indicated, of the 126 credits required for graduation, students are required to complete only 45 credits in communication/broadcasting field. The remaining 81 credits are in English composition, foreign languages, mathematics and/or science, humanities, social sciences, and electives chosen by individual students.

The required radio-TV credits are also carefully designed to offer students a balanced practical and theoretical experience. In reality, none of the broadcast courses can be classified as purely "hands-on" learning.

Even in the production courses a great deal of time is spent on the theoretical aspects.

The foregoing information attests to the fact that the "trade-school image," as pertained to broadcast education is simply an unfortunate misperception. A misperception that must be corrected by the broadcast educators and the broadcast students through publications, research, seminars, and discussions.

NOTES

1. The Roper Organization, Inc., Electronic Media Career Preparation Study, December 1987, pp. 4-5.

2. Paul F. Gullifor, "Fighting the Trade School Trend," College Broadcaster, January 1990, p. 24.

3. Jeffrey M McCall, "Beyond the Roper Report," Feedback, Summer 1990, pp. 9-10.

4. Jannette L. Dates, "The Study of Theory Should Guide the Curriculum," Feedback, Summer 1990, pp.10-11.

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COMMUNICATION
RADIO-TELEVISION OPTION

Required for graduation - 126 credit hours including the following:

CORE Requirements

I. **Communications**

Writing .....3 or 6

___ ENGL 103
___ ENGL 100-105
___ ENGL 104-105

Interpersonal Communications 3

___ COM 114

Foreign Language (12-hour sequence: French, German, or Spanish). 12

___ 101 ___ 102 ___ 203 ___ 204

II. **Science and Mathematics** 12

_____ Twelve hours in science and mathematics with a
_____ minimum of three hours in each. No sequence
_____ required. Computer Science or Logic acceptable
_____ for mathematics.

III. **Humanities and Social Sciences** 24

___ Literature
___ Philosophy (not Logic)
___ History
___ Aesthetics
___ Economics 210
___ Political Science
___ Psychology 120
___ Sociology 100 or Anthropology

Total 54 or 57

IV. **Requirements for the Radio-Television Option** 45

A. The following CORE requirements: (24 credits)

___ COM 201 Intro to Mass Media
___ COM 202 Elect Media
___ COM 250 Mass Com and Society
___ COM 254 Radio-TV Perform
___ COM 331 Radio Production
___ COM 332 Tele Production
___ COM 334 Journ for Elect Media
___ COM 355 Fund of Advertising

B. Choose ONE Track: (9 credits)

(1) Production Track:

___ COM 436 Script Writing
___ COM 441 Advanced TV Production
___ COM 533 Documentary Television

(2) Management Track:

___ COM 430 Broadcast Sales
___ COM 532 Telecom Sys Mgmt
___ COM 539 Broadcast Programm

C. Choose TWO from the following: (6 credits)

___ COM 253 Intro to Public Rel
___ COM 255 Intro to News Writ & Edit
___ COM 325 Interviewing
___ COM 330 Theories of Mass Com
___ COM 352 Mass Communication Law
___ COM 430 Broadcast Sales*
___ COM 434 Prac in Radio-TV
___ COM 436 Script Writing*
___ COM 441 Adv TV Prod*

(* May not also be used to satisfy track requirement.)

D. Choose TWO from the following: (6 credits)

___ COM 213 Voice and Diction
___ COM 225 Intro to Rhet & Soc Infl
___ COM 300 Intro to Res in Com
___ COM 318 Prin of Persuasion
___ COM 320 Grp Disc & Conf Leadshp
___ COM 323 Bus & Prof Spk
___ COM 343 Fund of Oral Intpr
___ COM 365 Comm & Aging
___ THTR 230 Acting I
___ ENGL 376 The Movies OR ENGL 386 Hist of Film to 1938 OR ENGL 387 Hist of Film to Present

Electives: ..... 27 - 24